

Andrea Comer, Achievement First, Appropriations Committee Hearing, February 16, 2010

Good evening Chairpersons Harp and Geragosian and Members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Andrea Comer and I come before you as a proud supporter and employee of Achievement First. I know that I don't need to tell you that we are in dire economic times, and I am grateful that this committee has supported level funding for charter schools in the face of such difficulties.

As you know, the Governor's Education Cost Sharing Commission recommended that funding for charter schools be brought in line with traditional public school funding. The State Board of Education recommended such equity as well, but the Governor did not incorporate such recommendations into the budget. Again, given the daunting task of addressing a huge budget deficit, we understand and appreciate the level funding.

However, even with flat funding we are racing with a pulled hamstring. Charter school students are funded at about 75 percent of traditional public school students. This is about more than dollars – this is about children and investing in their futures.

How have our investments performed? As you know, we came to you in desperation two years ago to avoid the tragedy of a half-completed school, the Achievement First Hartford Academy. We're proud to say that last year it posted the single greatest gains of any school in Hartford.

But funding remains the constant barrier. Elementary and middle school parents who have seen profound academic improvement in their children are concerned because they know that without needed funding there will not be Achievement First high schools in Hartford and Bridgeport.

Every year we come to you and ask you to commit to our children just as we do every single day. We urge you to consider that just because a parent chooses a charter school for his or her child should not mean that child is worth less. This year we come to you with the same pleas but also with a solution in hand.

When I served on the Hartford Board of Education, every vote I cast was not always the most politically expedient or popular. But I do know that each vote was in support of what I believed was best for the children. I ask you to do the same—and as you consider the Governor's budget proposal and begin to work on your own budget plans, please bear in mind that the long-term solution to Connecticut's charter school funding system is the one which members of this Committee have themselves spoken of in past hearings—and which is employed by all but two other states—a funding system in which money follows children to charters schools.

Thank you.